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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2027  
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SUBJECT: PRC DENIAL OF USS KITTY HAWK PORT VISIT

Classified By: Ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr. Reasons  
1.4 (b/d).

11. (S) Summary: In response to our queries as to the reason for the recent PRC denial of port visit permission to the USS Kitty Hawk, officially the Chinese have been unwilling to say anything more than the United States "already understands" the reason. A Taiwan Affairs Office official, while claiming no inside knowledge about the decision, commented pointedly on the timing of the announcement of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan only three days after the successful visit to China by Secretary of Defense Gates. End summary.

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Ambassador and DCM Protest  
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12. (S) As soon as the Embassy became aware of the problem on Wednesday evening, November 21, shortly after 5:00 p.m., the DCM called the State Council Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office and the MFA North American and Oceanian Affairs Department immediately to request an appointment for the Ambassador with Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui and to protest the MFA decision to deny the USS Kitty Hawk's November 21-25 Hong Kong port visit. The State Council referred the DCM to the MFA. The MFA said they would pass the message to VFM Zhang. After our repeated attempts to obtain more information, VFM Zhang finally phoned the Ambassador at 1:35 p.m. on November 22 to report that the MFA had decided to make an "exception for humanitarian purposes" and to allow the port visit, noting that the United States "already understands" the reason the visit was initially denied, but further averred that the denials of the planned December 31-January 4 visit by the USS Reuben James and the December 4 semi-annual C-17 support flight still stand. In a separate conversation with the DCM on November 23, Zhang said he worked on the issue "nonstop" from the time of the DCM's initial call until the PRC's (belated) announcement allowing the port visit.

Timing of Taiwan Arms Sale a Possible Cause  
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13. (S) Taiwan Affairs Office Hong Kong, Macao and Overseas Affairs Department Director General Yang Liuchang acknowledged to Poloff on November 25 that the USS Kitty Hawk visit was mishandled. Prefacing his comments by saying that he had no particular knowledge of how the decisions were made on the ship visit, Yang went into a lengthy discussion of how "betrayed" the Chinese felt after hosting Secretary of Defense Gates, hoping for a boost to military-to-military ties, only to learn from a public website three days later that the United States was again selling arms to Taiwan

during this "sensitive period."

14. (S) Yang alleged that the U.S. side could have cleared the air by informing the Chinese of the impending decision on the arms sales during Secretary Gates' visit to China. He said that China appreciated President Bush notifying President Hu in advance that he would attend the Dalai Lama's Congressional Gold Medal ceremony, despite China's strong opposition to the event itself.

MFA is Mum

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15. (C) Calls to MFA interlocutors at the working level in recent days have produced no further information as to the Chinese reasons for the denial.

Comment

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16. (C) We are unlikely ever to receive a clear and authoritative explanation for the PRC decision to deny the USS Kitty Hawk port visit, but the speculation by our TAO contact above seems quite plausible. The denial of additional Hong Kong visits adds to the likelihood that the Chinese were trying to express their unhappiness with the United States in connection with the Taiwan arms sales. The admittedly belated reversal of the USS Kitty Hawk denial on "humanitarian grounds" suggests a realization that the PRC had not fully considered the impact of canceling the port visit on Thanksgiving.

RANDT